

Town of Merrimac Comprehensive Plan Summary

The Town of Merrimac is a community where natural resources and rural character define the way of life. Situated between picturesque Lake Wisconsin and the dramatic rise of the Baraboo Bluffs, it is the area's poignant beauty, peace and serenity that draws visitors to its abundance of public land and recreation areas, and invites them to travel its scenic and winding roadways. These same qualities attract new residents and help to retain existing residents. In addition, the Town's proximity to neighboring communities of Sauk City, Prairie du Sac, Baraboo and the rapidly growing Madison metropolitan area suggest that Merrimac may continue to face growth pressure. This growth will be further spurred by pending improvements to Highway 78 and Highway 12 and the continued draw of the Town's abundant natural assets.

PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Town of Merrimac desires to remain a rural community, defined by its beauty, small-town character; and rich natural, agricultural, and historical resources. The Town is well positioned to achieve this vision over the next twenty years. The Town has an excellent track record through its 1993 Development Plan and zoning ordinances of balancing limited growth and development while preserving the natural, agricultural, and cultural features of the Town that the residents place so much value on. The challenge over the next twenty years is to continue to promote this balanced development and preservation in the face of increasing development pressure, transportation improvements facilitating increased "exurban" development, demographic shifts facilitating second home ownership, and changing expectations for public services and facilities.



The Town prepared this *Comprehensive Plan* through a 15-month long process that included the work and dedication of the Town Planning Commission, substantial public participation efforts including a survey sent to all landowners in the Town, an interactive Town Vision Forum, and intergovernmental coordination. The Plan document includes ten chapters, covering land use; transportation; agricultural, natural, and cultural resources; utilities and community facilities; housing; economic development; intergovernmental cooperation; and implementation as outlined by State law. The following summarizes the key recommendations.

FOCUS RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN STH 78 AND LAKE WISCONSIN

This Plan directs all new residential development to the area between STH 78 and Lake Wisconsin. This policy accomplishes several of the Town's planning objectives including:

- Retaining agricultural land, and preserving natural resources and open space in the largely undeveloped portion of the Town
- Providing a range of housing opportunities
- Avoiding rural "sprawl" and leap-frog development
- Minimizing land speculation throughout the Town
- Forwarding the directives of the 1992-93 Development Plan

PRESERVATION OF RURAL CHARACTER

The rural character of the Town is embodied by its winding roadways, expanses of farmland, wetland, forests, and open space, and the unassuming presence of development in the Town. This Plan establishes a strong framework for the Town to continue to perpetuate this character that while difficult to define, makes the Town of Merrimac a truly special place:

- Defining a “Roadway Setback” along the south frontage of STH 78 that preserve scenic vistas by mandating a minimum 100 feet setback and landscaped area between structure and the highway.
- Encouraging the economic viability of agriculture
- Establishing a future land use pattern dominated by agricultural and conservation lands
- Promoting thoughtful, high quality design of new residential and commercial projects
- Focusing economic development efforts on small scale activities and businesses, such as alternative agriculture; businesses.



NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION

Preservation of water quality in Lake Wisconsin, the Bluffs, wetlands, soil, wildlife and other resources were among those issues that resonated most with the Town residents throughout this process. Conservation of natural resources permeates every chapter of this *Plan*.

- Protecting steep slopes, woodlands, and drainageways from development in addition to acknowledging state and county regulations over wetlands, floodplains, and shorelines.
- Requiring detailed forest plans for any activities removing more than 10% of an areas forest cover
- Designating most of the Town as *Agricultural Preservation or Conservation* land uses where development is not allowed or is strictly limited
- Encouraging landowners to participate in numerous land preservation programs.

COOPERATION IN A COMPLEX INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONTEXT

The abundance of land in public ownership in and adjacent to the Town, its historical arrangement with the Village of Merrimac, and its position on the edge of Sauk County result in a complex intergovernmental planning context. This Plan acknowledges and embraces the opportunities and challenges this presents.

- Continued participation in the process to determine future rural-oriented reuse of the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant
- Coordination with WisDNR, the County on the preservation of agricultural and natural resources
- Exploration of potential linkages through the Town between existing segments of the 4 mile Ice Age National Scenic Trail linking the Merrimac Ferry to Devils Lake State Park
- Ongoing discussions with the Village of Merrimac about the potential for shared services and facilities, land use coordination and conflict, and mutual goals and concerns